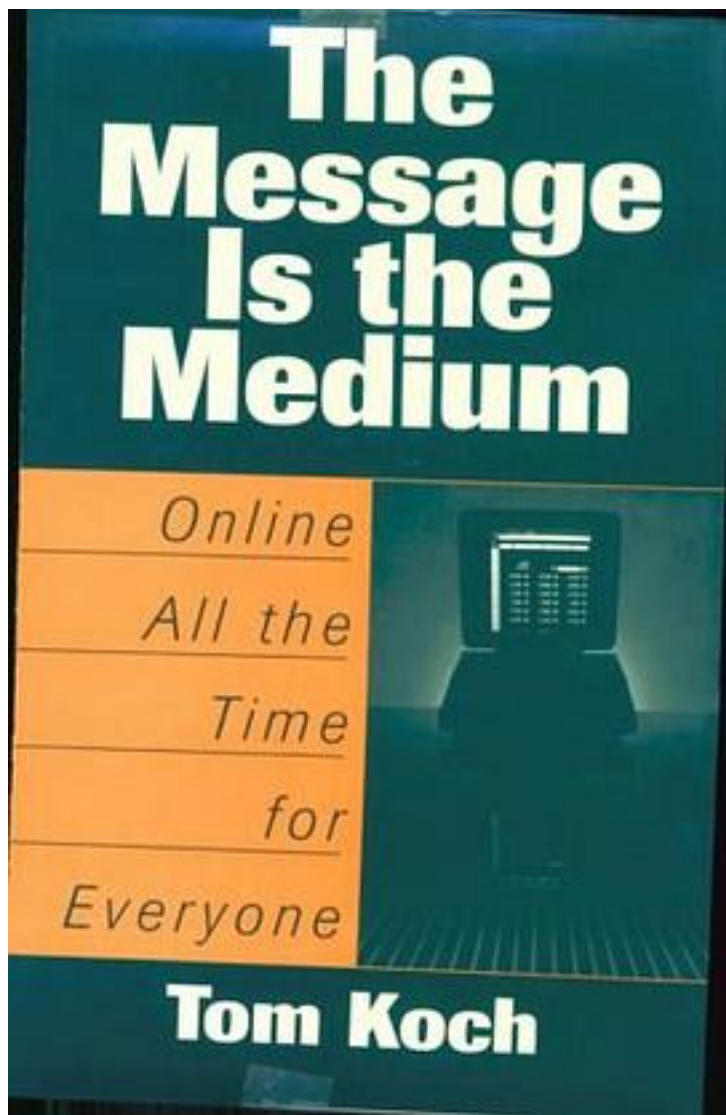


The Message Is the Medium



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出版者:Praeger Publishers

出版时间:1996-09-30

装帧:Hardcover

isbn:9780275955496

The Message is the Medium is both a radical reevaluation and a new approach to understanding online data and information systems, the "Information Highway." It is not another "how-to" guide, although it does contain practical and instructional data. Rather, it offers a general tutorial explaining the system-at-large from the perspective of the user, and the data he or she needs to resolve problems and crises. It thus provides a simple, powerful, and unique explanation to online resources: what they are and what they do for the individual. All chapters are illustrated. The book's common sense perspective advances six unique and contrarian positions: *The message is the medium. What drives online expansion is its content, the ability to message with enormous specificity and directness to people, groups, and digital library resources. Popular acceptance of these technologies is driven not by the medium's attraction, but by the quality and content of data it allows users to send and receive. *The Internet is not the Information Highway, any more than New England is the United States. The Internet is a region of online services, a confederation of UseNet, academic resources, mail services, etc. *Data is not information. The online universe contains little information. What is available is data from which information can be constructed. At best, the whole can be thought of as a "databahn," linking potential sources, not a road to certainty. *Online access is not revolutionary, but evolutionary. It grows from a cultural and technologic history. It is the end point of years of change. This means that in learning to use these tools we can build on what is known, rather than attempting to learn something entirely new. *The evolution is technical. The personal computer joins older technologies in a way which is intuitive and comprehensible. Digital systems combine the immediacy of the telephone, the permanence and specificity of written mail, and the richness of old-fashioned libraries. *The evolution is cultural. Digital data storage is the end point in a long, history which began with the printing revolution of the 18th century. From then until now, the goal has been to provide normal people with ever better data. This has meant decreasing, at each stage, the mediation of expert "gatekeepers" and inept officials. Thus the online evolution speaks to the historical struggle by normal people for ever greater public access to unbiased and unmediated data.

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